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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Liberia

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The General Assembly, in paragraph 8 of its resolution 55/176 of 19 December 2000, requested the Secretary-General continue his efforts to mobilize all possible assistance within the United Nations system to help in the reconstruction and development of Liberia, including the return and reintegration of refugees, displaced persons and demobilized soldiers.

The present report outlines the evolution of the current situation as it relates to security, political, economic and humanitarian developments in the country and highlights the United Nations collaborative activities in support of the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Liberia in 2001.

After seven years of a devastating civil war, Liberia is still faced with the challenges of reconciliation, peace-building, reconstruction and recovery. The elected Government installed in 1997 has not been able to generate the required resources domestically and internationally to revive the economy to its pre-war level. In addition to a severe decline in international aid, since May 2001, the country has been under selective sanctions imposed by the Security Council; this has increasingly adversely affected foreign investment and donor confidence. Furthermore, the outlook for durable peace and security has been dampened by sporadic fighting between Government forces and dissidents, resulting in significant displacements of populations both internally and externally. The gains that have been made in the

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recovery and resettlement of displaced people and refugees between 1997 and 2000 are being reversed by a new humanitarian crisis. In early 2002, the conflict has spread to five counties causing nationwide insecurity. An estimate of 100,000 internally displaced persons are now receiving humanitarian assistance for their survival.

The United Nations agencies and the United Nations Peace-Building Support Office in Liberia have continued to provide humanitarian assistance and to support the consolidation of the peace process and the transition from relief to sustainable recovery.

The consolidation of peace remains the most urgent challenge facing Liberia. The root causes of the conflict identified as weak economic management, social inequalities and ethnic polarization remain to a great extent unresolved.

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 55/176 of 19 December 2000, wherein the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to mobilize all possible assistance within the United Nations system to help in the reconstruction and development of Liberia, including the return and reintegration of refugees, displaced persons and demobilized soldiers.

2. After seven years of a devastating civil war, Liberia is still faced with the challenges of reconciliation, peace-building, reconstruction and recovery. The elected Government of Liberia installed in 1997, saddled with an enormous national debt burden, has not been able to generate the required resources domestically and internationally to revive the economy to its pre-war level. The five-year Medium-Term Plan for reconstruction and development, which was prepared by the Government with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is poised to succeed the National Reconstruction Programme. The Government's objectives, as spelled out in the Medium-Term Plan, are to consolidate peace, reinforce the democratization process and strengthen the mechanism for conflict prevention, good governance, macroeconomic reforms, socio-economic development and poverty reduction. The implementation of the Plan would require enormous resources, which cannot entirely be mobilized domestically.

3. All dimensions of human development indicated in the United Nations common country assessment are low. The incidence of poverty remains extremely high, with 76.2 per cent of the population living below the poverty line of US$ 1 per day, with severe poverty estimated at 52 per cent. Liberia is among the countries with the lowest level of food security, with 35 per cent of the population undernourished. With a population of 2.7 million, life expectancy is recorded at 47.7 years. Under-five child mortality is 194 per 1,000, with maternal mortality at 578/100,000 live births. HIV/AIDS prevalence has increased to 8.2 per cent, with an upward trend. About 75 per cent of the population lack access to primary health care and safe drinking water. The literacy rate is only at 33 per cent (compared to 58 per cent for sub-Saharan Africa), with high gender disparities (40 per cent for male and 26 per cent for female).

4. Furthermore, since 1999, the outlook for durable peace and security has been jeopardized by the armed conflict between the Government and dissident forces, which started in the county of Lofa. In early 2002, in response to the spreading of the conflict to five counties, the Government imposed a state of emergency, which was extended for another six months in May 2002. The immediate backdrop to the current crisis can be traced to unimplemented portions of the Abuja peace agreement (S/1995/742, annex), under which elections were held following the disarmament of the factions in 1997. The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process was not completed and remobilization has occurred. The expansion of State militias and security forces contributes further to the gun culture and insecurity across Liberia.

5. The resumption of peace negotiations between the three Mano River Union countries brings some hope of stabilization within the region. After a long stalemate following the decision to revitalize the Mano River Union institutions in 2000, the Heads of State of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone met in February 2002 in Rabat. The Rabat summit was followed by several meetings of Ministers of Defence, Justice and for Foreign Affairs in Conakry, Freetown and Agadir, Morocco and resulted in an agreement for the deployment of joint security and confidence-building units along the common borders of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, in a determined bid to rein in cross-border incursions, which have been the major cause of conflict in the subregion.

6. The renewed hostilities have resulted in significant displacements of populations both internally and externally. The gains that have been made in the recovery and resettlement of displaced people and refugees between 1997 and 2000 are being reversed by a new humanitarian crisis. In early 2002, the conflict spread to five counties causing nationwide insecurity. At present, over 100,000 persons are internally displaced, owing to the ongoing fighting between the dissident and Government forces, and there is a growing number of Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries. This continuous instability in Liberia is creating a perpetual dependency syndrome, which has damaging consequences for the future development of the country. Cumulatively, about 19.2 per cent of the Liberian population depended on humanitarian assistance in 2001. Accordingly, support is required

from the international community to address the development and residual humanitarian challenges facing the country.

7. In respect to the rehabilitation and reconstruction needs of Liberia, the response of the international community has slackened since the last donor conference organized in Paris in April 1998. Between 1997 and 1999, development assistance declined by 72 per cent. Efforts to mobilize external resources in support of both humanitarian and development needs have been adversely affected by a number of factors, ranging from the international isolation of Liberia to donors' concerns about good governance, human rights and respect for the rule of law and subregional peace. The United Nations agencies, the European Union and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have maintained their assistance in the areas of social services, food security, governance and humanitarian services. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are not present in Liberia.

8. The overall objective of the United Nations system has been to contribute to the fulfilment of both humanitarian and developmental objectives as spelled out in the National Reconstruction Programme and the succeeding Medium-Term Plan. The complexity of the Liberian situation still requires the building up of synergies between humanitarian and development efforts. The United Nations has adopted a comprehensive approach to peace-building, including the transition from relief to sustainable recovery. This strategy is predicated on the urgent need to put in place the building blocks for the effective transition from dependence on humanitarian relief to longer-term sustainable recovery. In view of the above-mentioned goals, United Nations assistance is geared towards building institutional capacity for good governance and economic management, supporting community reintegration and recovery, improving livelihood opportunities and responding to the needs of refugees, internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups.

II. Governance, security and the rule of law

9. Liberia still exists in a fragile political setting. Five years after democratic elections, the political landscape remains uncertain, especially as the country moves towards general elections in October 2003. The rule of law and respect for human rights are critical challenges. Further to the Mano River Union Summit of Heads of State held in Rabat in February 2002, positive steps have been taken by the Government to initiate a process of national reconciliation, such as the presidential amnesty of political opponents, in furtherance of confidence-building, and the preparation of a National Reconciliation Conference to be held in Liberia in July 2002. In March 2002, under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in Abuja, Nigeria, Government representatives have engaged in dialogue with civil society organizations and opposition leaders, including those in the diaspora.

10. For most of 2001, dissident incursions mounted by the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy have increased security concerns. In 2002, the spread of the fighting to five counties, notably to the second city of the country, Gbarnga, and to the vicinity of the capital city of Monrovia, has heightened the tension. Since early February 2002, the country has been under a state of emergency, declared by the President. The deteriorating security situation has seriously affected United Nations operations in the country. In addition, salary arrears of civil servants, the increase of the price of rice and the depreciation of the exchange rate could trigger civil unrest.

11. The fact that Liberian armed forces are still to be restructured remains a matter of concern. The coexistence of several legally established units and a number of special military or paramilitary groups within the Liberian armed forces, most of them being underpaid, is not conducive to the strengthening of the security environment. The restructuring programme prepared by the Government has not been implemented. In addition, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process initiated by the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was not seen through completion and many of the core ex-combatants have been reintegrated into the renewed security apparatus. The demobilization, restructuring, and retraining of the national army and the police, is a necessary condition to attain sustainable peace and security, the restoration of the respect for human rights and the rule of law in Liberia.

12. ECOWAS has continued to intensify its efforts in consolidating peace in the subregion and has been key

in renewing the dialogue between the Government of Liberia and the opposition. Civil society groups and, in particular, the Mano River Women's Peace Network have also played a pivotal role in fostering peace within the Mano River Union, which culminated with the summit of the Heads of State of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in February 2002 in Rabat under the auspices of King Mohamed VI of Morocco. In furtherance to the Rabat summit, it was decided to revive the Mano River Union Joint Security Committee, which comprises the Ministers of Defence of the three countries. The Mano River Union Foreign Ministers, meeting in Agadir, Morocco, in April 2002, agreed on the deployment of joint border security and confidence-building units along the borders of the Mano River Basin, in a determined bid to rein in cross-border incursions, which have been the major cause of conflict in the subregion. The agreement came into force on 15 April, permitting Mano River Union member countries to monitor arms and troop movement and to reduce tensions among the three MRU States.

13. The United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Liberia (UNOL), as well as UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), have been supporting the reconciliation process and the restoration of sustainable peace in the region, notably through the Mano River Women's Peace Network. UNOL has pursued efforts towards the consolidation of peace and democracy in Liberia. This has entailed undertaking measures aimed at defusing both national and subregional tensions. In this regard, UNOL has worked closely with ECOWAS and the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), as well as with civil society organizations to support the Government of Liberia to contribute to the peace process in Sierra Leone. On the domestic front, UNOL continues to be involved in the preparatory work for the National Reconciliation Conference, in fostering confidence-building and dialogue among the members of Liberian society, including opposition leaders. The United Nations system has also contributed significantly to creating awareness on issues of respect for the rule of law and human rights, in partnership with the Government, civil society organizations, human rights groups and non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations.

14. UNDP continued to support the promotion of good governance through a full-fledged project, which, among other outputs, enhanced national dialogue on governance concept and practice. The project facilitated discussions on issues of human rights and the rule of law, as well as supported the capacity assessment of eleven government ministries and agencies, the Legislature and the Judiciary. A national framework on good governance has been produced and a series of workshops conducted. The lack of adequate resources hampered the government's efforts to strengthen the Judiciary and the National Legislature for transparent dispensation of justice and effective handling of constitutional matters. In this respect, UNICEF provided support to the training of magistrates and police officers through the juvenile justice initiative.

15. Rebuilding the capacity of civil society has been a priority of the United Nations to enhance participation, national ownership and social cohesion. In democratic governance, UNOL and UNDP supported civil society organizations and human rights groups such as the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia, the Catholic Peace and Justice Commission and the National Human Rights Centre of Liberia, the Press Union of Liberia, as well as community-based organizations, to foster social cohesion and peace-building initiatives at the community level. UNICEF supported the establishment of an Eminent Persons Group to advocate for children and the peace initiative of the Crusaders for Peace.

III. Macroeconomic performances

16. The overall performance of the Liberian economy has not revived as expected. The present Government inherited an enormous national debt burden of US$ 2.8 billion and has not been able to generate the required resources domestically and internationally to return the economy to its pre-war level. The gross domestic product (GDP) remains below 50 per cent of its pre-war level, the per capita income has fallen to less than US$ 200; the national budget for fiscal year 2000/01 of US$ 90.7 million is only one third of the 1987 budget. The unemployment rate in the formal sector is approximately 85 per cent.

17. The agricultural, tertiary and informal sectors have been the stimuli for economic growth. The agriculture sector is constrained by lack of material inputs and declining credit, as well as continuous nationwide insecurity. The progress made in the

production of the food crops (rice and cassava), which had reached 70 per cent of the pre-war level in 1999, is threatened by the displacement of the farming population from the most productive regions of the country. The tertiary sector, which includes trade, grew by 2 per cent over 2000/01, owing to increases in productivity in communication and commerce. Foreign trade is a major contributor to GDP (64 per cent of GDP in 2000 and 44 per cent in 2001). The growth in export earnings, estimated as 14 per cent in 2000/01, was attributed to increases in the export of rubber and logs. However, the trade deficit increased by 21 per cent in 2001, as a result of poor macroeconomic policy and structural weaknesses in the economy. The informal sector has become the most robust, providing employment for about one third of the total labour force, estimated to be 980,000.

18. On the one hand, on the fiscal front, national revenue performance improved by 4 per cent, from 22 per cent in 1999 to 26 per cent in 2000/01. On the other hand, recurrent expenditure accounted for 68 per cent of actual revenue of US$ 82.8 million. Expenditure on social services has not exceeded 10 per cent of actual annual revenue since 1997. About 85 per cent of expenditure on social service (i.e. health, education, water and sanitation) have been funded by United Nations agencies and other donors. By May 2002, the Government was seven months in arrears with salary payment to public sector workers, which resulted in widespread absenteeism.

19. After a relatively low inflationary period from 1997 to 2001, inflation rose rapidly to over 20 per cent between January and May 2002 (Central Bank of Liberia's estimates) because of the high demand for United States dollars, which hastened the depreciation of the Liberian dollar. The increase in the prices of petroleum and other imported commodities has had a domino effect on the prices of other commodities, including domestically produced food products. The renewed conflict has taken a considerable toll on economic activity and agricultural production has been disrupted.

20. UNDP has been engaged in the provision of direct assistance, such as logistical support and technical expertise on institution-building, policy formulation, programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation to enable key government institutions (e.g. Ministry of Finance, Budget Bureau, Central Bank, Ministry of Planning) involved in economic management to restore basic functioning capacity. In particular, UNDP provided technical support to the Ministry of Finance in the preparation of the new Tax Code and assisted the Ministry of Planning to coordinate the preparation of the Medium-term Plan and the drafting of the Statistical Act. Short-term training was also provided to the Budget Bureau, the General Auditing Bureau and the Ministry of Commerce.

IV. Humanitarian assistance

21. The spread of the fighting to five counties has resulted in large population movements and a significant increase in the internally displaced persons caseload and new Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries. The gain in recovery and resettlement of displaced people and refugees between 1997 and 2000 is being reversed by a new humanitarian crisis. The current internally displaced population receiving humanitarian assistance is officially estimated to be 100,000, compared to a planning figure of 30,000 in 2001. In addition, an estimated population of 200,000 internally displaced persons and some Sierra Leonian refugees are believed to remain in conflict areas, which are not accessible to humanitarian assistance. It is estimated that there are currently about 65,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in Liberia, 35,000 of whom receive assistance and protection from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

22. The highly volatile security situation and the difficulty in accessing conflict zones make the work of the humanitarian organizations increasingly complex. Owing to the difficult security environment and funding constraints, the capacity of the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission to coordinate and respond to the humanitarian situation is limited. Despite these constraints, the Commission, together with the humanitarian agencies, have been able to address the immediate needs of internally displaced persons and refugees as well as host communities, notably through the provision of potable water, mobile clinics and food supplies. UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNFPA focused their assistance on immunization, delivery of essential drugs and nutritional assistance, provision of safe drinking water and sanitation and emergency education in life skills, such as reproductive health and prevention and control of sexually transmitted diseases

and HIV/AIDS. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) supplied basic farm inputs to restore productive capacity of 12,890 war-affected farmers in 10 counties. The emergency programme of the World Food Programme (WFP), as a part of the regional programme for Guinea and Sierra Leone as well, provided monthly food rations to refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as therapeutic feeding and school feeding. The opening of the Office for Liberia of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in October 2001, together with the appointment of a Humanitarian Coordinator, have been welcomed by the humanitarian community as a means of strengthening coordination, strategic planning and monitoring of the humanitarian response. Under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has played a particularly important role in collecting, analysing and sharing humanitarian information, thus ensuring greater cohesion and cooperation between the Government, United Nations agencies and the non-governmental organizations community. In support of the Humanitarian Coordinator, the Office has also facilitated coordination through regular meetings between humanitarian actors.

23. To address the pressing issue of protection, the United Nations agencies have developed a Plan of Action to prevent sexual exploitation and other abuses in the camps. The Plan focuses on building the capacity of the main stakeholders, such as humanitarian workers and security forces, and strengthening the services for abused women and children. UNICEF, together with Save the Children and the International Committee of the Red Cross developed a child protection advocacy strategy and supported the establishment of child-friendly spaces, while UNHCR implemented a reporting and monitoring mechanism on sexual exploitation and other abuses in refugee camps.

24. Given the prevailing security situation, little support has been provided to the resettlement of internally displaced persons and the reintegration of Liberian returnees. With the peace efforts currently under way in Sierra Leone, UNHCR launched a programme of voluntary repatriation and was able to repatriate a first batch of 10,850 refugees to Sierra Leone between February and April 2002. However, the increase in the number of registered Sierra Leonean refugees coming from conflict zones has tended to offset almost equally the number of those returning. With the completion of the elections in Sierra Leone in May 2002, UNHCR plans to resume the voluntary repatriation programme.

V. Health

25. The United Nations system, particularly WHO, UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA, and non-governmental organizations supported the Government in the completion of a National Health Policy, based on which a strategic plan has been developed. The policy provides for decentralization of health services. FAO has been providing technical support to the Government for the development of the national plan of action for nutrition. UNICEF and WHO supported the essential drugs programme of the Government through national capacity-building and institution-building. UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO have supported county health teams to strengthen health service delivery within communities, while WFP provided food to all hospitals. WHO, UNICEF and UNDP supported the construction of water and sanitation facilities and training in public health education at the community level.

26. In the area of the Expanded Programme on Immunization, WHO and UNICEF, with logistical support from UNDP and financial support of funds from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, have assisted the Government in the implementation of six national immunization days for polio eradication, including two ECOWAS synchronized national immunization days, with funding from USAID, International Lutherian, GAVI and Center for Disease Control support. The campaign provided 100-per-cent coverage of children under age five. WHO and UNICEF supported Multi-antigen catch-up Expanded Programme on Immunization campaigns in 7 of 15 counties which significantly contributed to the improvement of programme coverage from 35 per cent in December 2000 to 55 per cent in December 2001. Liberia received the Meritorious Award of the Task Force on Immunization for 2001.

27. In the area of safe motherhood, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA and non-governmental organizations completed a needs assessment, developed a protocol and supported training of health workers in emergency obstetric care. In addition, UNICEF and WHO

launched an integrated management of childhood illness strategy. With regard to the "Roll Back Malaria" initiative, WHO and UNICEF supported or funded non-governmental organization efforts in the introduction of insecticide-treated mosquito nets. The review of an existing malaria policy was commenced with the component of anti-malarial drugs for Liberia finalized.

28. The United Nations theme group on HIV/AIDS supported the strengthening of the National AIDS Control Programme. In collaboration with USAID, UNFPA and WHO provided condoms in all accessible areas of the country in support of safe sex and family planning. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) provided an allocation of US$ 150,000 for adolescent reproductive and sexual health training. Technical and logistical support was provided to facilitate HIV testing and public awareness. HIV/AIDS awareness programmes were developed in the 6 most populous local languages of Liberia, out of the existing 16, thus reaching about 50 per cent of rural or indigenous Liberians. Despite these efforts, there is still a low level of commitment and awareness on HIV/AIDS and the National AIDS Control Programme lacks adequate resources to implement a national strategy. The HIV prevalence rate is reported to be 8.2 per cent, with confirmed AIDS cases as at 31 December 2001 totalling 532, compared with 426 in 2000, an increase of about 20 per cent.

VI. Education

29. UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO supported the Government in the area of education policy development. The national Education Sector Policy document and the Education Master Plan were adopted by the Legislature and are now to be printed into handbills. To support the decentralization of the education system, UNDP and UNICEF supported the establishment of 68 local school management committees. UNICEF contributed to the installation of gender-flexible and gender-sensitive education systems through the implementation of the African Girls' Education Initiative, which will lead to the establishment of a National Training and Technical Assistance Network for girl education in Liberia.

30. UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP assistance to the education sector was to support a number of key initiatives aimed at revitalizing basic education, strengthening national capacities in teaching and data-collection methodologies, curriculum reform, improving learning opportunities, and ensuring the provision of emergency education to children affected by war. UNICEF continued to support the Government in its implementation of an accelerated learning programme for over-age students with the provision of financial, technical and material support to the Ministry of Education and 50 ALP schools. UNFPA assisted curricular reform efforts with the production and distribution of Family Life Education textbooks. A high priority was placed on emergency education, with UNICEF providing school in the box kits to over 30,000 internally displaced children. UNICEF and UNHCR in collaboration with the International Rescue Committee, and Save the Children UK, supported teacher training. WFP supported Community-based School Feeding Programme in over 500 public primary schools.

VII. Community revival and restoration

31. Community revival and restoration focus on the rehabilitation of basic social services and the provision of sustainable livelihood opportunities, with the objective of increasing community capacity for the delivery of basic social services, increasing local capacity for self-organization and participation and reducing the dependence of the population on humanitarian assistance. The United Nations and the donor community, in particular the European Union, assisted the Government in rehabilitating clinics, schools and market facilities which were destroyed during the war. A total of 153 fully equipped schools and 70 clinics have been renovated through UNDP micro-projects support for resettlement and reintegration, covering 8 of the 14 counties of Liberia, thus creating employment for approximately 13,000 persons. In the area of water and sanitation, 450 latrines and 130 water wells (equipped with hand pumps) have been constructed. WFP has also provided food assistance for people working to rebuild the social infrastructure under food-for-work schemes.

32. To promote productive sector activity, UNDP and UNHCR, have continued to run microcredit and microgrant schemes to support agricultural and small-scale income-generating activities, giving priority to women's initiatives. UNICEF, UNDP and UNHCR have provided skills training opportunities in

plumbing, carpentry and rural shelter construction. FAO has been supporting lowland rice production, cassava production and processing, small-scale fisheries and the provision of essential agricultural inputs to crisis affected internally displaced farm families, with the aim of decreasing dependency on humanitarian assistance. United Nations agencies have also worked to strengthen the local coping mechanisms of host communities through leadership and management skills training.

VIII. Food security

33. In the complex conflict and post-conflict situation of Liberia, FAO and WFP focused on a blend of emergency-related and development-oriented activities in the agricultural sector. The WFP emergency programme targeted food assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons while WFP also supported school feeding and food-for-work schemes. FAO supported the Government in improving food security and the delivery capacity of the agricultural services. FAO assisted 300 farm families in swampland rice cultivation and crop intensification, especially the promotion of cassava and vegetable production. Small-scale TeleFood projects were implemented at the village level to benefit farming communities, particularly women's groups, in support of their aspirations to attain greater household food security. Technical support to post-harvest activities was also initiated with financial support from UNDP. FAO has also supported the Government in the rehabilitation of the agricultural statistical services of the Ministry of Agriculture and in the development of a national forestry programme. In collaboration with WFP and local and international non-governmental organizations, FAO initiated emergency assistance to 7,500 crisis-affected farm families with the provision of farming tools and seeds for internally displaced persons and host communities, with a positive impact on the improvement of household food security.

34. The United Nations theme group on rural development and food security and an FAO-chaired forum involving a wide range of stakeholders, has continued to implement various activities aimed at raising awareness and advocacy for the cause of promoting rural development and the fight against hunger, malnutrition and poverty. The forum has provided a means for many organizations and individuals to express their concerns and recommendations, which are widely shared and channelled to the political and administrative decision-making bodies.

35. The interventions in the agricultural sector have certainly resulted in an increase and diversification in food production, especially of staple food crops, such as rice and cassava. In 1999, FAO estimated that the production of the main food crops (rice and cassava) had reached 70 per cent of the pre-war level. However, the deteriorating security situation may lead to a further deterioration of the food security situation in Liberia, because of the disruption of farming activities in the most productive regions and the displacement of the farming population.

IX. Gender concerns

36. There is a national commitment to promote gender equity, gender equality and gender empowerment and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. UNDP, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UNFPA and UNICEF have supported the establishment of the Ministry of Gender and Development, and Gender Desk Offices in all ministries, as well as capacity-building in socio-economic gender analysis. UNDP and UNIFEM, with the support of the United Nations theme group on gender, have been assisting the Government and women's groups to undertake advocacy activities to eliminate discriminatory laws and sociocultural practices against women. In particular, the project has supported the sensitization of the National Legislature on the bill on rights of inheritance for spouses of both statutory and customary marriages. The United Nations theme group on gender has contributed in raising the consciousness of the Liberian people on issues of gender equity, the Beijing Platform for Action and empowerment of women.

37. United Nations agencies paid particular attention to gender mainstreaming in their programmes, promoting girls' education, adolescent and women's health and reproductive health and training in income-generating skills and life skills. In particular, microcredit facilities and FAO TeleFood-funded projects give priority to households headed by women. The United Nations also supported the establishment of the national women non-governmental organizations

secretariat. The quality of the partnership with women's institutions for gender mainstreaming is remarkable, among them the West African Women's Association, the Liberian Women's Initiative, African Women Educationalists, the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia and rural women's groups.

X. Major challenges facing the country

38. The main challenges facing the country are the resolution of the present conflict and the establishment of sustainable peace. The root causes of the conflict, identified as weak economic management, social inequalities and ethnic polarization, remain to a great extent unresolved. The resolution of the conflict and the creation and consolidation of sustainable peace in Liberia is a sine qua non to any development endeavour geared towards reducing poverty in the country. Consolidation of peace is dependant on the residual problem of reintegration of ex-combatants and restructuring the military. The security forces need to be restructured and trained as suggested by ECOMOG and the Government of Liberia. The incipient democracy needs to be consolidated by strengthening civil society organizations, gender and human rights organizations, governance and economic management institutions, as well as forging subregional peace and security among the countries of the Mano River Union.

39. The continuous instability in Liberia is creating a perpetual dependency syndrome, which has damaging consequences for the future development of the country. The degradation of the security and humanitarian situation, as well as the limited resources, makes it difficult for the United Nations agencies and bilateral donors to implement development and capacity-building programmes going beyond immediate recovery needs.

XI. Recommendations for action by the General Assembly

40. **There is a need for greater recognition of Liberia's security, humanitarian and development crises which hold serious implications for stability in the region. The Secretary-General emphasizes the need for all parties involved in the conflict in Liberia to ensure the protection of the civilians and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance as well as to guarantee the safety of humanitarian workers. The international community is called upon to strengthen its commitment to respond to the humanitarian and development needs of the Liberian people and to encourage the Government in the path to institutional reforms that will promote greater transparency in the management of the economy, strengthen democratic institutions by reinforcing the rule of law and respect for human rights and establish inclusive processes for reconciliation and confidence-building, particularly in the run-up to the 2003 elections. It is therefore recommended that the General Assembly reaffirm its resolution 53/1 of 16 November 1998 and call for further support for the humanitarian needs and the rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in Liberia, in view of the increasing vulnerability of the Liberian people.**